

TESTIMONY OF SHARON J HEDDLE

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE 2/23/2022

Governor's Proposed FY 23 Budget Adjustments

H.B. No. 5037 (COMM) AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023.

INCREASE FUNDING FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTERS BY \$1 MILLION DOLLARS

My name is Sharon Heddle. I am a registered voter in Groton. I am the Executive Director of Disabilities Network of Eastern CT, one of the five Independent Living Centers in CT. Our agency serves eastern CT, including New London County, Windham County, and a small part of Tolland County. I am also the chairperson of CT Association of Centers for Independent Living, a collaboration of the five Independent Living Centers. I thank you for your continued support of the Independent Living Centers (ILCs) and ask that you increase funding for the ILCs by \$1M dollars annually.

Our current state budget provides each of our five ILC with \$92,000 (plus an additional \$60,000 that is **exclusively** for providing deaf services). In 2004, the CT State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL), created by the Governor appointed State Independent Living Council, set a base level of funding for each of the ILCs at \$550,000; we have never reached that base funding amount, and in fact, in some years we have faced significant decreases, that have not been restored. The decreases combined with the cost-of-living increases have resulted in each ILC needing to make tough decisions, which included reducing the number of towns we can provide services to, creating waiting lists and reducing our staff. Increasing our total funding by \$1M will get us closer to the base amount of \$550,000 per ILC and will restore and expand our services to people with disabilities.

Independent Living Centers provide each of our consumers with an Independent Living Plan, ensuring each person's unique needs are addressed specific to the individual. We assist all people with disabilities regardless of their age, income, or the type of disability they have, helping them work toward achieving their goals.

Each ILC provides Core Services that include Information and Referral, Independent Living Skills, Peer Mentoring and Networking, Individual and Systems Advocacy, Nursing Facility Transition Services and Youth Transition Services. In addition to the basic Core Services, we provide services that may be unique to each consumer. The variety of these services include arranging transportation, researching and applying for grants for home modifications, ramps, hearing aids, and budgeting. In most recent years we have assisted in any way possible for consumers to obtain COVID vaccinations and boosters, provide technology to prevent social isolation, teach how to use online grocery shopping, online banking, and Zoom to connect with doctors, family, and friends.

The CT Association of Centers for Independent Living supports the Governor's proposed funding for increasing vocational services, technical education, mental health and domestic violence services; all are opportunities to improve independent living for people with disabilities. And with increased funding for the ILCs, we can be valuable resources and partners in those initiatives.

I urge you to increase the funding for the ILCs by \$1M dollars or more.



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